

HEAVY SEAS

for SOMALI PIRATES

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For international shipping, the waters off the Horn of Africa had become some of the most dangerous in the world. The source of the danger was as old as sea travel, but one thought to have been largely relegated to the past – pirates. By 2008, Somali pirates were hijacking dozens of ships each year, taking hundreds of sailors hostage and raking in tens of millions of dollars in ransom.

But a noticeable drop-off in piracy by the end of 2011 continued to accelerate in 2012, thanks to multinational naval patrols and the use of armed security teams aboard cargo vessels. In October 2012, the International Maritime Bureau's (IMB) Piracy Reporting Centre reported a 54 percent decline in attacks compared to the same period in 2011. Eager to avoid a re-emergence of the piracy plague, the

international community is determined to see that trend continue.

MULTINATIONAL COUNTERPIRACY MEASURES ARE SUCCEEDING OFF THE HORN OF AFRICA

PUSHING BACK

Most of the pirates hail from the coast of lawless Somalia and have rampaged through the Gulf of Aden, the Arabian Sea and, increasingly, hundreds of kilometers out into the Indian Ocean. These waters are the primary trading route between Europe and Asia. For much of the past decade, pirates have preyed on fishing boats, cargo ships, oil tankers and even pleasure yachts. Oil tankers from the Persian

Gulf, for example, generally skirt the east coast of Africa en route to the Suez Canal and European and North American ports.

According to the IMB's data, the number of attacks off the Horn of Africa is the lowest since 2008, when the piracy problem became so acute that the international community was stirred to action. A piracy report by the U.S. Navy indicates that only eight vessels had been successfully hijacked as of mid-November 2012, down more than 80 percent from the 51 successful hijackings

in 2010 and the 52 in 2009. The number of targeted ships (those either fired upon or nearly boarded) was also down more than 80 percent from a 2009 high of 129.

Several international naval counterpiracy operations are now under way in the area, including European Union (EU) and NATO naval task forces with substantial contributions from Russia, China and India. Better security on merchant ships, including armed guards, has also helped reduce the problem. Armed merchantmen were standard operating procedure for allied convoys crossing the North Atlantic during World War II but had become relics in the modern, peacetime maritime industry. Until recently, many nations did not allow weapons on their merchant ships. Today, a high percentage of large ships traversing high-risk areas off the Horn of Africa carry armed security details. The practice will likely continue because it's working: As of December 2012, no ships protected by armed guards have been hijacked, according to the IMB.

Although most such victories have occurred at sea, security operations on shore have also aided the anti-piracy cause. In autonomous Puntland in northern Somalia, the Puntland Maritime Police Force had some success against pirate bases before it ran into money and political problems. Kenyan military operations against the al-Shabab terrorist network in southern Somalia have also hindered pirate activity in the region.

NAVAL COOPERATION

Most Somali pirate teams consist of fewer than 20 untrained men, operating from skiffs, armed with automatic rifles and rocket-propelled grenades. Despite their relatively moderate military capabilities, they have cost the world in excess of \$6.5 billion annually, including ransoms worth \$160 million in 2011, according to estimates from the One Earth Future Foundation, a U.S.-based think tank. Those increased costs include higher insurance premiums and fuel costs and expensive delays at sea while ships await the arrival of convoys. In response to the outsized financial impact of these ragtag hijackers, dozens of nations, including the world's greatest powers, have dispatched warships.

According to EU Naval Forces (EUNAVFOR), about 25 warships from the various task forces and contributing nations patrol the high-risk zone.



Royal Marines are deployed from the British frigate HMS Chatham, operating as part of **OPERATION OCEAN SHIELD**, in preparation to board a pirate mother ship off the Horn of Africa in 2010.

NATO

The groupings are:

- **EUNAVFOR** (*Operation Atalanta*) The EU launched the mission in December 2008 and authorized its continuation through 2014. Atalanta fields four to seven ships, depending on the time of year, and its core mission includes protecting World Food Programme shipments and supply shipments for the African Union's peacekeeping mission in Somalia.
- **NATO** (*Operation Ocean Shield*) According to NATO, Ocean Shield, which began in August 2009, "contributes to providing maritime security in the region and is helping to reduce the overall pirate attack success rate." In addition to naval escort and protection, NATO offers counterpiracy capacity-building help to regional countries.
- **Combined Maritime Forces** (*CMF*) Combined Task Force 151 (CTF-151) is a 27-nation partnership, led by the United States, with contributions from Europe, Asia and North America and a mission "to promote security, stability and prosperity." Command of CTF-151 changes regularly. Recent commanders have been from Pakistan, Turkey and South Korea. The combined force is focused on combating piracy, especially off the Horn of Africa.
- **Others** The Russian Navy, which joined multinational anti-piracy operations in 2009, has been especially effective. Russian warships have conducted a number of successful operations, including the May 2010 rescue of the oil tanker MV *Moscow University*, which then EU Naval Force Commander John Harbour called "an excellent operation all around." The Shared Awareness and Deconfliction initiative (SHADE), a joint effort of India, China and Japan, began patrolling in December 2008, and Saudi Arabia also sends regular naval patrols to the region.

The various naval forces in the region meet four times a year to coordinate actions, discuss tactics and share intelligence, according to *The Economist*. And NATO and Russian naval forces conducted joint counter-piracy exercises in late February 2013 in the Gulf of Aden. The bedraggled pirate crews, when intercepted, are typically no match for modern warships. They usually attempt to flee or throw their weapons overboard and pretend they are fishermen. As unemployed pirate Abdirizaq Saleh told The Associated Press



AFP/GETTY IMAGES



NATO

Suspected **SOMALI PIRATES** are detained in Dwarka, India, in 2011. Somali pirates operate deep into the Indian Ocean to avoid naval patrols closer to the African shore.

PORTUGUESE MARINES from the ship NRP Alvares Cabral capture pirates after thwarting an attack on a fishing boat off the coast of Somalia.

in September 2012: “The risks involved in the hijacking attempts were very high. EU navies were our main enemy.” Still, catching pirates has been difficult. The area in question is enormous, about 8.3 million kilometers – as big as Western Europe – and the pirates have extended operations farther into the Indian Ocean to avoid naval patrols near shore.

Atalanta and other operations are increasingly taking the fight to the pirates’ onshore bases and pre-emptively focusing on pirate “mother ships” at sea. Under its newly extended mandate, Atalanta helicopters hit camps near Harardheere, Somalia, a pirate haven, in May 2012, destroying fuel and boats. Lt. Cmdr. Jacqueline Sherriff, Atalanta’s spokesperson, stated that such a move represents a shift of tactics designed to create “a disruptive effect in areas previously considered to belong to the pirates, damaging their sense of impunity.”

SELF DEFENSE

Given the amount of area they have to cover, naval patrols can’t be everywhere at once, and commercial ships often must make the dangerous passage unprotected. Therefore, shipping companies are using enhanced onboard security measures – from passive to lethal – to fight piracy on their own.

EUNAVFOR and NATO advocate using nonviolent means to “avoid, deter or delay piracy attacks.” According to the CMF website, these include maintaining 24-hour lookouts; inhibiting deck access; maneuvering evasively; and installing deck lighting, netting, razor wire and electrical fencing.

Armed security teams have also been vital. A November 2012 analysis from Stratfor, a U.S.-based security consultant, estimated that as many as 70 percent of large commercial ships in the region carry armed guards. British maritime security experts Tom Patterson and Anthony Rix told *The Economist* that armed guards are probably “the biggest game

changer” in piracy reduction.

Some experts, however, consider the use of armed guards to be risky, citing legal issues with transporting and operating weapons and fears that armed merchantmen could provoke the pirates to escalate violence. International law stipulates that ships at sea are governed by the laws of the nation under which they are flagged. Until recently, many countries forbade commercial vessels from carrying arms, but those laws have been changing. Still, many countries don’t allow ships to bring weapons into their territorial waters, forcing some crews to dump expensive weapons into the sea before they enter ports.

The private security model has proved so effective – and profitable for the rapidly expanding maritime security industry – that a private company called Typhon plans to launch its own security flotilla to augment international naval forces, the BBC reported.

NO TIME TO RELAX

It’s clear from the dramatic drop in pirate attacks that counterpiracy measures – multinational naval patrols, armed private security teams and onshore operations – have been effective. Piracy has become much more dangerous for the pirates and much more expensive for its mostly Somali financiers.

But the risk remains high, and most analysts believe it’s too early to declare victory. Norwegian piracy expert Stig Jarle Hansen told *The Christian Science Monitor* that the pirate apparatus remains intact and that the lure of profit will inspire the pirates to return when they perceive a decline in interest from the international community.

Rear Adm. Duncan Potts, EUNAVFOR’s operational commander, agreed, noting a thwarted pirate attack in November 2012: “This is an indication that pirates still intend to get out to sea, and all involved in countering piracy, whether they are the military or industry, must remain vigilant and prepared.” □